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RURAL WOMEN DEVELOP LEADERSHIP

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Radio talk by Grace E. Frysinger, Office of Extension Work, U. S. Department of Agriculture, National Farm and Home Hour, presented over a net work of 57 associate NBC stations, Wednesday, December 12, 1934.

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Leadership is one of the most magical and inspiring words in the English language. It suggests some challenging endeavor designed for the good of mankind.

One of the most dramatic but little heralded recent developments in leadership has been among rural women as guided by the home demonstration staff of the Cooperative Extension Service of the United States. The fact that the objective of this endeavor is for altruistic service; that there is no financial recompense; and that there has been no widespread publicity campaign regarding places, activities or results, only adds to the significance of the movement whose objective is improved rural home and community conditions.

That more than 148,000 busy farm women gave volunteer time during 1933 averaging approximately two to four days per month per person to this endeavor, is a record of which those concerned with the plan are justly proud.

Like most truly great movements this significant development in leadership grew out of a simple beginning. In 1921 in Massachusetts more rural women desired instruction in clothing construction than could possibly be taught directly by the one and only clothing specialist for whom funds were then available on the Home Demonstration staff of the Extension Service in that State.

So Mrs. Reed, the Clothing Specialist, devised a plan to train five women in each community in the necessary information and teaching, and they in turn were to train others in their local communities desiring similar information.

In an amazingly short space of time the plan was applied to one field after another of subject matter. Clothing, foods, home management, health, home furnishings, landscape gardening, child development, and family relationships.

Although local leadership was developed primarily as a means of extending home economics subject matter to more women, it has served many other purposes.

When the Red Cross was asked to relieve the situation created by the drought and depression in North Dakota the Home Demonstration clubs, under the guidance of local leaders, trained by the Home Demonstration staff, served as local units for the Red Cross. They located available supplies, found homes where assistance was needed, indicated the type of assistance necessary, and distributed the supplies to the needy. Arkansas

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Home Demonstration leaders, named by Home Demonstration agents, served as demonstrators of desirable gardening, food conservation and clothing renovation practices when the drought situation became critical in that State.

As State after State found itself in dire straits the Home Demonstration agents directed these local leaders who gave public demonstrations to those on relief and to all others who wished the information, as to fruit and vegetable canning, clothing renovation, bread baking and soap making.

In many States these rural women canned each tenth can to donate for public relief and they held many canning bees for similar purposes. During the past summer, in the drought-stricken States, Home Demonstration agents taught local leaders, who in turn helped families who had no feed for their cattle to slaughter and can the meat for home use.

All during these hard times these leaders have helped keep up the morale of rural people by promoting inexpensive forms of community recreation in their local communities. As the Recovery Program got under way, the Home Demonstration agents helped make available to these leaders accurate factual material, particularly in regard to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. The women then served as sources of authentic information in this respect for their neighbors and other interested persons.

Leadership is a magical word and today tens of thousands of rural homemakers of the United States are demonstrating how altruistic leadership at its best can serve unselfishly and constructively for the common welfare and through Home Demonstration work, a greatly needed national asset, capable and independent thinking rural leadership is rapidly coming into full flower.

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